



## MEMORANDUM

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DATE: November 10, 2011

TO: The Honorable Mayor  
and Council Members

FROM: Fred H. Gray, Jr.  
Director  
Parks and Recreation

SUBJECT: Inquiries Regarding Expedition Tanzania and Reid Park Zoo Elephants

It has come to my attention that you and/or your offices are receiving inquiries and communications regarding the current elephants at the Reid Park Zoo. It appears that these inquiries are the result of a campaign initiated by "In Defense of Animals" (IDA), a national animal advocacy group, in an attempt to influence the management of the Tucson elephants.

The following is a link to the information that is being disseminated by IDA: [http://ida.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em\\_id=21201.0&printer\\_friendly=1](http://ida.convio.net/site/MessageViewer?em_id=21201.0&printer_friendly=1). Emails and letters received by Zoo staff and elected officials are taken directly from this site. It is typical of this animal advocacy group to use these tactics. The Los Angeles Zoo, the Bronx Zoo, San Diego Zoo, Woodland Park Zoo, Philadelphia Zoo and many others have had the same experience. The goal of this group is to contact elected officials, or the management board of each zoo, and attempt to appeal to their emotions rather than scientific information and fact. Please be advised that IDA is encouraging appearances at the Call To Audience during the Mayor Council meeting on Tuesday, November 15 and promoting an outreach event at the Zoo on Sunday, November 20.

It is important to understand that Reid Park Zoo is committed to progressive elephant care, management, and conservation in partnership with other zoos accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums. Reid Park Zoo has been professionally caring for elephants since 1966. The program continues to evolve, assuring quality whole-life care for resident animals. Although several years ago the intent was to keep long-term residents Connie and Shaba together, today that plan has changed as new information and new opportunities for both animals have become available. As always, the goal is to provide the best possible care for the animals at Reid Park Zoo and make the most responsible decisions for their future while, at the same time, participating in the national effort to increase the population of elephants in captivity.

The intent of this correspondence is to provide you with previous background information and current updates regarding the management plan for elephants at the Zoo as the completion of *Expedition Tanzania* is rapidly approaching.

The discussion concerning the feasibility of continuing to keep elephants in Reid Park Zoo began in January, 2005. It was based on the Association of Zoos and Aquarium's (AZA) research which indicated that, based on current captive populations and breeding rate, elephants would no longer exist in zoos in as few as 30 years if the rate of breeding did not improve. All zoos that managed elephants in 2005 were asked to



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breeding did not improve. All zoos that managed elephants in 2005 were asked to make a commitment that they would improve exhibits, increase space dedicated to elephants and work to better manage breeding programs. In June of that year, the Mayor and Council approved Resolution 20112 affirming the community's intent to retain elephants at Reid Park Zoo and directed staff to investigate and recommend a funding plan to achieve this goal.

At that time AZA was recommending the female African elephant "Shaba" be bred as a valuable potential contributor to the future elephant population. Relying on new scientific information as it became available, AZA and the Zoo staff reconsidered the original breeding recommendation. The professional staff at Reid Park Zoo is committed to making the best choices for the animals in their care as science and new data play into decision-making for the animal collection. The decision to not breed Shaba did not diminish the importance of Reid Park Zoo's role in the captive elephant program and did not negate the need for additional space to participate in the AZA breeding plan for elephants.

As the discussion continued through the first half of 2005, IDA solicited local advocates to protest the management of elephants in captivity; specifically at Reid Park Zoo. Their emphasis at that time was to encourage the elected officials to remove the responsibility of care of the elephants from professional staff and transfer animals to an "Elephant Sanctuary". Sanctuaries are unlike zoos in that there are no detailed accreditation guidelines to assure consistency and quality of elephant care. In contrast, the AZA accreditation program sets and maintains rigorous and specific standards for member zoos and aquariums. For many reasons, Zoo staff disagreed with the IDA position at that time; one of which was the need for Connie (the Zoo's Asian elephant) and Shaba to be separated.

With the completion of *Expedition Tanzania*, the Zoo will acquire additional African elephants. In cooperation with AZA, the African Elephant Species Survival Plan, as well as the Taxon Advisory Group, staff is working with colleagues at San Diego Zoo and Safari Park to plan elephant moves. Due to the successful elephant program in San Diego, their herd is large enough to be split – allowing for additional potential breeding and conservation efforts in the future. Once implemented, this proposal will serve as the model for future AZA elephant plans and moves. Reid Park Zoo will be the first zoo to accept a self-contained breeding group – a new approach to elephant management that is progressive by allowing social groups to remain intact.

The current plan is for Tucson to receive two female African elephants and their offspring and one male African elephant. The exact animals will be determined when *Expedition Tanzania* is closer to completion. Shaba will be introduced to this herd in the new exhibit. Reid Park Zoo staff members have been working with management staff from San Diego Zoo and Safari Park over the past several years to adjust elephant management protocol and to closely mirror the training and husbandry techniques utilized in San Diego in order to facilitate a smooth transition. This plan directly addresses the need to provide additional space and opportunity for successful breeding

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to increase the population of captive elephants which was the original purpose of making the long-term commitment to continue to manage elephants at Reid Park Zoo.

At the same time, a collaborative agreement between the San Diego Zoo and Reid Park Zoo has been made to move the female Asian elephant to San Diego Zoo's state of the art Elephant Odyssey habitat. That exhibit was built expressly to cater to the needs of older Asian elephants. Again, the similarity of training and husbandry techniques will allow for an easy transition. Connie will be moving to an exhibit which provides an amazing opportunity for her and one that could not have been predicted several years ago.

Once the new herd is settled in Tucson, Reid Park Zoo will continue working with partnering institutions to decide the best course for elephant breeding and management throughout the region. Reid Park Zoo will remain committed to the future of progressive elephant care.

Please contact me or Reid Park Zoo Administrator, Susan Basford, if you have questions or desire additional information. I have also attached the standard responses that staff at both the Reid Park Zoo and San Diego Zoo are providing to these inquiries.

FG:DG:ExpeditionTanzania&ReidParkZooElephants

Attachments: 2 - Standard Response for elephant inquiries: Tucson & San Diego

cc: Richard Miranda, City Manager  
Liz R. Miller, Assistant City Manager  
John R. Sefton, Deputy Director  
Susan Basford, Administrator – Reid Park Zoo  
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